

NEWS MEDIA OBJECTIVITY

MODERATOR... AL KAPLAN

News media objectivity

The degree of objectivity provided to the consumer by the public media has been a cause of concern for all time. Nowhere has this been more a point of discussion than with the print media, which now extends to the Digital version provided by the Internet. This has most recently been in the fore with the firing at the New York Times. (See article below).

The basic questions suggested are as follows..

What responsibility does Public media have to separate objective information from opinion or advocacy in its presentations to its readers?

Should both objectivity AND opinion be presented by the Media to its subscribers ?

Or may a Public presentation be ONLY one sided?

Historically, laws were in place in past times enforcing OBJECTIVITY in providing information. There are no such legal specifications today. Should there be?

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/07/business/media/james-bennet-resigns-nytimes-op-ed.html>

James Bennet Resigns as New York Times Opinion Editor

A. G. Sulzberger noted “a significant breakdown in our editing processes” before the publication of an Op-Ed by a United States senator calling for a military response to civic unrest.

By [Marc Tracy](#)

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James Bennet, the former editorial page editor of The New York Times, in 2017. Larry Neumeister/Associated Press

James Bennet resigned on Sunday from his job as the editorial page editor of The New York Times, days after the newspaper’s opinion section, which he oversaw, published a much-criticized Op-Ed by a United States senator calling for a military response to civic unrest in American cities.

“Last week we saw a significant breakdown in our editing processes, not the first we’ve experienced in recent years,” said A. G. Sulzberger, the publisher, in a note to the staff on Sunday announcing Mr. Bennet’s departure.

In a brief interview, Mr. Sulzberger added: “Both of us concluded that James would not be able to lead the team through the next leg of change that is required.”

At an all-staff virtual meeting on Friday, Mr. Bennet, 54, apologized for the Op-Ed, saying that it should not have been published and that it had not been edited carefully enough. An editors’ note posted late Friday noted factual inaccuracies and a “needlessly harsh” tone. “The essay fell short of our standards and should not have been published,” the note said.

The [Op-Ed](#), by Senator Tom Cotton, Republican of Arkansas, had “Send In the Troops” as its headline. “One thing above all else will restore order to our streets: an overwhelming show of force to disperse, detain and ultimately deter lawbreakers,” he wrote. The piece, published on Wednesday, drew anger from readers and Times journalists. Mr. Bennet declined to comment.

Mr. Bennet’s swift fall from one of the most powerful positions in American journalism comes as [hundreds of thousands of people](#) have marched in recent weeks in protest of racism in law enforcement and society. The protests were set in motion when George Floyd, a black man in Minneapolis, died last month after being handcuffed and pinned to the ground by a white police officer’s knee.

The foment [has reached other newsrooms](#). On Saturday night, Stan Wischnowski [resigned](#) as top editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer days after an article in the newspaper about the effects of protests on the urban landscape carried the headline “Buildings Matter, Too.” The headline prompted an apology published in The Inquirer, a heated staff meeting and a “sickout” by dozens of journalists at the paper.

Mr. Bennet’s tenure as editorial page editor, which started in 2016, was marked by several missteps. Last spring, The Times [apologized](#) for an anti-Semitic cartoon that appeared in the Opinion pages of its international edition.

Last August, a federal appellate court [found](#) that Sarah Palin, the former vice-presidential candidate, could proceed with a defamation lawsuit against The Times over an editorial edited by Mr. Bennet that inaccurately linked her statements to the 2011 shooting of a congresswoman.

During Mr. Bennet’s first year on the job, two Times national security reporters [publicly objected](#) to an Op-Ed by the journalist Louise Mensch, who cited her own reporting on United States law enforcement’s purported monitoring of the Trump presidential campaign. Times reporters who had covered the same story, along with reporters at other outlets, were skeptical of her claim.

Mr. Bennet worked and held key jobs in the Times newsroom from 1991 until 2006, when he left the newspaper to become the editor of The Atlantic. Since his return, he has widely been considered a [possible successor](#) to Dean Baquet, who has been in charge of the newsroom for six years.

In his four years as editorial page editor, Mr. Bennet sought to expand Opinion's range, making it more responsive to breaking news and better positioned to cover the tech industry. While he hired several progressive columnists and contributors, he also added conservative voices to the traditionally liberal department.

He reduced the number of unsigned editorials and encouraged editorial board members to write more signed opinion pieces; one editorial board member, Brent Staples, won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing last year for a series of opinion columns on race in America.

Under Mr. Bennet, the opinion section also published investigative journalism, developed newsletters and a podcast. It also [published](#) a much-discussed Op-Ed by an anonymous Trump administration official who described a "quiet resistance" within the federal government.

The most prominent conservative columnist hired by Mr. Bennet, Bret Stephens, angered many readers with his [inaugural Times column](#), in which he chastised the "moral superiority" of those who look down on climate-change skeptics. Late last year, Mr. Stephens published another column, headlined "[The Secrets of Jewish Genius](#)," that led to widespread criticism. After a review, the editors appended a note to the column and re-edited it to remove a reference to a study cited in the original version after it was revealed that one of the study's authors had promoted racist views.

Mr. Bennet is the brother of Michael Bennet, a U.S. senator from Colorado, and he recused himself from presidential campaign coverage during his brother's unsuccessful run for this year's Democratic nomination.

Katie Kingsbury, a deputy editorial page editor, will be the acting editorial page editor through the November election, Mr. Sulzberger said in his memo to the staff. Jim Dao, the deputy editorial page editor who oversees Op-Eds, is stepping down from his position, which was on the Times masthead, and taking a new job in the newsroom. Mr. Baquet, the executive editor, said Sunday that he and Mr. Dao had just started discussing possible jobs for Mr. Dao. Mr. Dao did not reply to a request for comment.

Ms. Kingsbury, 41, was hired in 2017. Previously she was on The Boston Globe's editorial board, where she won a Pulitzer for editorial writing and edited another Pulitzer-winning series.

In a note to the Opinion staff Sunday, Ms. Kingsbury, who declined to comment for this article, said that until a more "technical solution" is in place, anyone who sees "any piece of Opinion journalism — including headlines or

social posts or photos or you name it — that gives you the slightest pause, please call or text me immediately.”

Senator Cotton’s Op-Ed prompted criticism on social media from many Times employees from different departments, an online protest that was led by African-American staff members. Much of the dissent included tweets that said the Op-Ed “puts Black @NYTimes staff in danger.” Times employees objected despite a company policy instructing them not to post partisan comments on social media or take sides on issues in public forums.

In addition, more than 800 staff members had signed a letter by Thursday evening protesting the Op-Ed’s publication. The letter, addressed to high-ranking editors in the opinion and news divisions, as well as New York Times Company executives, argued that Mr. Cotton’s essay contained misinformation, such as his depiction of the role of “antifa” in the protests.

Mr. Sulzberger said at the Friday town hall meeting and in his note on Sunday that a rethinking of Opinion was necessary for an era in which readers are likely to come upon Op-Eds in social media posts, divorced from their print context next to the editorial page.